

Things are getting better at nursing home

To the editor:

As a member of the Sullivan County Board of Commissioners, I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the condition of the county. As many of you are aware, our county faces a difficult financial position. At the center of this issue is Sullivan County Health Care, also known as the nursing home. There has been much discussion of the discontinuation of the Genesis contract and the implications it has had on the finances.

Under Genesis' guidance, last year's budget called for unprecedented revenues — revenues Genesis failed to deliver. This combined with an annualized cost of \$446,000 for Genesis consulting (more than \$250 per hour) made the accumulation of our debt inevitable.

This all leads us to where we are today: a county with a deficit of roughly \$2 million. Our choices are to deal with it and pay it off through increased taxes or roll it into a bond and pay interest on it. I feel as though we as commissioners have a responsibility to deal with this issue head on and do what's best for our constituents.

My comment a few days ago of "I don't think it's unreasonable to expect the taxpayers to foot the bill" simply meant I don't like to pay for things twice, and I don't like to pay interest when I don't have to.

We can continue to push this debt forward as has been done in the past and pay for it twice. Or we can make the hard and unpopular decision to deal with it, as our nursing home in its best days has never made a significant profit, certainly not one that would allow us to pay this back in a reasonable amount of time.

We have a responsibility to our older residents to take care of them in the best possible manner and we take this responsibility very seriously. The quality of care at our facility is second to none and will remain that way. Through increased efficiency, management continuity, growth of rehab services and proper billing we will be able to take this facility off the tax rolls again.

We have recently hired a new nursing home administrator and a new director of nursing. Filling these positions, with what we hope will be long-term employees, will add the continuity needed to run an efficient organization (with Genesis we had five different administrators over a two-year period.)

I firmly believe that the culture of the facility comes from

the top and this is why I am excited about the prospects for the future. Rebecca Trudell has been in her position as director of nursing for a few weeks and is performing flawlessly. Our new administrator, Ted Purdy, will be joining the facility in mid-November. Over the next few months we will make various other changes to improve the performance of the county as a whole.

Jeff Barrette
County Commissioner